2/29/76

Mr. Richard Gallen
14 E 60 St.,
New York, N.Y.

Dear Dick,

This relates to a different literary property, one in which I'm told Geis had enough interest to offer a $20,000 advance. Whether or not this is true I am not alone in regarding it as a beautiful story of great possibilities so, when it came to mind while I was taking a walk this morning, I write about it. I hope my wife will have time to read and correct because prior to walking I drafted 2,500-3,000 words of an affidavit I should get into the mail somehow today, in the FOIA suit for the withheld King data.

This is an interracial love story, all true and better than the best novelist could invent, a series of personal tragedies, remarkable heroism with a partial happy ending that became a beginning and a remaining quest for a stolen child that is the reason I was able to obtain the literary material. It is the story of a beautiful, well-born Hungarian teenage girl who became one of the war's waifs with the first bombing of Budapest, of her wanderings around Europse, escapes from death but not always raping, of her final rescue by a young black American soldier who comes from and returned to Frederick, in the suburbs of which they now reside. Harry was the perfect gentleman, not taking advantage of Lida when he succored and provided for her. They fell in love, were not able to marry, lived together and had two children when he was moved out. Lida went to work and kept both children, one of which was stolen when her work required that she place them with a German family. The suspicion is that the infant boy was used by a German girl as a ticket to the U.S. She hopes attention to the book can lead to her finding her son.

When I learned about this some years ago, probably about 1971-2 (my files will show) and of Lida's interest in telling the story so it might lead to the son, she came here and agreed to an in-depth taped interview. I told her I am not the person to write the story and explained why. She agreed that the literary material is mine and that I would also act as her agent in placing it with one skilled in the special kind of writing I believe the story really requires. The tapes run 5 hours. The character of the interview and the story are this:

I decided the best person to whom to take the tapes is an editor friend at Bantam, a department head who lived through that era in Germany. He started listening to the tapes the day they reached his office. Fascinated, he let all the work possible go to continue the audition. When he had to stop his then secretary beseeched him first to let her continue and then to borrow them and the office machine so she could hear them that night. She was alternately enraptured and weeping. When she returned the machine and tapes the next day Walter took them home with him and with his then mistress listened to them in full, repeating the beginning. His mistress was then Rosa Guy, also then head of the Harlem Writer's Guild. She fell in love with the story and I agreed that a woman and a black was the ideal person to write Lida's story. She prepared either a summary or an opening, Walter acting as her agent (which apparently precluded an offer to Bantam) gave it to Geis. Rosa later, after they broke up but remained friends, told me of the offer above.

Largely through her need, I'm told, to make her own living while also having no help and grandchildren, infants and beautiful, to raise, she never got around to completing the writing. Meanwhile, Lida is understandably distraught and has been pressing me to obtain the return of the tapes so they can be placed elsewhere. I would not think of subjecting her to the emotional trauma of reliving the kind of in-depth interview I did without rehearsal, one Walter decribed as the most sensitive, perceptive, detailed, competent and sympathetic ever in his experience. Lida was completely honest, completely

honest and revealing, totally natural, so despite the enormous emotional drain of an interview of this character what came through is more than just an exceptional if not unprecedented story but dialogue of the kind that can't easily be duplicated by one who did not actually live these tragedies, gratifications and problems with which, although so young, she managed to survive. It took years but in the end she found her lover and despite all the official and familial resistance was able to marry him. She had to engage in a loveless marriage (sanctioned and encouraged by her priest as a proper means to a proper end, getting to the United States so she could find her Harry) that ended in abuse of her and the child she was able to keep. When she had her citizenship and was not subject to deportation, having worked all the while and hidden enough of her money with the aid of her employer, when she had enough to set out with the child to find Harry, she did. They have been together since.

They are very average people, normal, natural, the kind with whom vast numbers of people can and I think will be sympatico. They had to overcome great local prejudice but today, with Harry spending their entire married life moonlighting from his regular job and Lida working with him on hers and his after-work employment, bought their own home in the country not far from here, several acres they both keep as few people do, meticulously and as ordinary country folk, raising much of their own food, etc.

I have spared you most of the extraordinary details in the hope you will have enough interest to spend an evening, perhaps with Jill, just listening to the tapes. My immediate problem is getting them back. Walter has been non-responsive and I've written often. In part this may come from a conflict he now appears to have between Dick Gregory, who brought us together, and me over Gregory's recent insanities. When I am in New York in a little over two weeks one of my hopes is to recover these tapes. Now that I have the recent fees with which to pay for a call I will try to phone Walter when my wife, who is taking a hot soak to relieve the pains of a fall, can be on an extension. She is also fond of Walter and the woman he is about to marry or has during our lack of communication.

You told me a friend was taking Warner over last October. You also told me you represent Geis. And there are other ways I think you can place this, perhaps also picking out the right writer. Walter was certain of considerable literary potential, so much so that according to Rosa he felt the Geis offer was inadequate, did not represent the investment the story warrants. I have no personal knowledge of this.

The story is Lida's story. The tapes are my property although I would not think of doing anything with them not in Lida's interest. Rosa has not performed. First there is the need to retrieve them. Then I would like you to consider whether there is not enough to start with paperback, place hardback rights and perhaps to begin with Hollywood. Walter, who is not less than quite competent, was certain of the movie potential, as I, without his experience, remain.

If there is anything to add after I place the call I'll add it.

Best,

Harold